Damage by Blink_Blue

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)
Genre: Angst, Billy's actions have the worst consequence, Brain Damage, Guilt, M/M, Post-Prison, Regret, There's a lot of crying
Language: English
Characters: Billy Hargrove, Steve Harrington
Relationships: Billy Hargrove & Steve Harrington, Billy Hargrove/ Steve Harrington
Status: Completed
Published: 2017-12-11
Updated: 2017-12-11
Packaged: 2022-04-03 05:20:40
Rating: General Audiences
Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Chapters: 1
Words: 1,563
Publisher: archiveofourown.org
Summary:

“This is a character who… is not a murderer, but you could see him accidentally taking something too far, and you could see this ending up with Steve being permanently brain-damaged. You hear those stories.”

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Ten years later, Billy finally returns to see Steve Harrington.

Damage

Author's Note:

> Quote is by Matt Duffer from Beyond Stranger Things Ep 3. It really struck a chord with me because this is exactly what I was thinking when I first saw that scene in 2x09. So here's what would happen if things had gone just a bit different.

The gates open and there's no one to meet him on the other side. Not that he expectedly anyone to be there. Billy hasn't had a visitor in years. No family, no friends. Just too much time alone with his thoughts.

There are faces that have haunted him for years. A father who screamed in his ear. A step-mother who turned the other way. A sister whose last words to him were that she hopes he dies in this prison. He remembers her young face twisted into a mask of hatred. It was the day of his sentencing. There were tears in her eyes, running down her cheeks. But it wasn't sorrow on his behalf. There wasn't a single person in that room who didn't think he deserved it.

The face he sees most often in his nightmares is covered in blood, broken under his own hands.

Ten years he got for what he did. His lawyer tells him he might get out in eight for good behavior. He's getting off easy, is what he was told. Ten years. It doesn't come close to what he took that day.

He swallows the freedom around him. It feels like bile rising in his throat. Billy shudders and takes one last look at the prison he rotted a decade of his life in. His lungs ache for a cigarette. He starts walking towards the bus stop, and he doesn't look back.

He's got sixty dollars in his pocket. He's carrying everything he owns in the world on his back.

There are days when he misses the roar of the Camaro's engine. The screech of her tires. The smell of rubber burning in his nostrils. He

would drag on a smoke, his eyes landing across the parking lot, on a young man with dark hair, Ray-Ban sunglasses, and a brilliant smile, leaning against a maroon Beemer with a pretty girl on his arm.

He liked that smile. And he broke it a couple weeks later.

Faintly, he wonders where that girl is now. Nancy, her name was. He wonders if she ever got out of this town. She broke down in tears after the judge announced his sentence. Relief mixed with painfully lingering sorrow, probably. Her small shoulders shook as she buried her face in her hands. She looked up from her mother's embrace just in time to see the bailiff walk him out, hands cuffed behind his back. Another face that haunts him.

The world's changed in the time he spent behind bars. The town he called home for such a short while looks different now. Brighter, somehow? Or maybe he's just accustomed to the grey of the prison walls.

On good days, the grey actually helped. On bad days, he couldn't stop seeing red. Red on his knuckles that wouldn't come off no matter how harshly he scrubbed. Red on his palms, red on the floor. Red on that face that won't leave his thoughts alone.

His stomach grumbles painfully. He thinks now that he's out, at least the food is something he can look forward to. Prison gruel always tasted like ash in his mouth.

There's a strange nervousness in his gut as he walks into a fast food joint and orders himself a burger. He never got nervous before. But nowadays, he doesn't know how to interact with society anymore.

He feels out of place. Older, and more tired.

Disappointment sets in when the hot burger doesn't taste any better on his tongue. He's perceptive enough to know the fault lies within himself.

He thinks something might have broken inside him that day. Maybe a part of him got left behind on that bloody floor. In the lights of the police cars and the siren of the ambulance, some part of his soul died.

Something he can't ever get back.

He watched them take him away. He watched the paramedics perform life-saving measures, moments before he was dragged away by the police.

Billy finishes his burger and continues towards his destination, with one more stop along the way.

He uses his pocket change to buy flowers. He can't show up empty handed after all these years.

The hospital walls are so white. His eyes wince under the bright fluorescent lights. His voice is hoarse when he says the name at the reception desk. He hasn't heard that name spoken out loud in years. His heart thunders in his chest as he waits for a room number.

The endless hallways blur together as he passes. Every instinct screams at him to run in the opposite direction. But he knows he has to face this. Even if he's ten years too late, he has to face this.

"Get out."

He should have left when Harrington told him to go.

Instead he laughed. He laughed after Harrington punched him in the face. He laughed again when he felt blood on his teeth. The sound of a plate smashing over the other man's head echoed in the room. And then he was lost in the oblivion of his rage. He fell deep into the darkness and he couldn't claw his way back out.

Something died that day, something within him. The other man wasn't so lucky.

For a moment that stretched too long, he'd forgotten himself. He didn't recognize the face he was beating. He didn't think about what he was doing. He couldn't hear the screams, the cries begging him to stop. The pounding that was his own fists, he couldn't *feel* any of it.

And then it was over.

The body beneath him twitched. The eyes were closed, blood seeping

into the floor. There was a horrible gurgling noise nearly drowned out by the sound of screaming children. It was a mockery of breath, the sound of a throat filling with blood.

His stomach churned as the clarity of his actions slowly washed over him.

Someone was crying.

“Call an ambulance! Call a fucking ambulance!”

Max finally pushed him out of the way. He fell onto the floor, staring in shock at what he had done. But the bitter reality was that whatever he had taken, it was already gone.

On the very worst nights since, Harrington would visit him in his dreams.

Today, Billy returns that favor.

He slowly pushes open the door of the room the receptionist had given him. He had thought about this day for ten long years. But none of it prepared him for this moment.

There’s hardly a sign of life on the bed. The ventilator and the machines make a steady hum. The sheets are so white. Flowers and cards and dusty photos with happy, smiling faces decorate the window sill.

Steve Harrington spent ten years in this bed. Billy can hardly recognize him.

He lets the door click behind him before he slowly approaches. He trembles with each unsteady step. The pain he feels hasn’t been lessened by time. The guilt and the regret eats away at him with every single passing second. Not a day goes by that he doesn’t wish he could take back what he did. Ten years isn’t enough-he would do a thousand if it meant it could bring back Steve Harrington.

He was told that Steve would never wake up.

Brain-damage, they told him.

He would be a vegetable for the rest of his life. Lying on that bed, kept alive by a feeding tube and a ventilator. Life support could keep his body going for decades, just… wasting away on that bed.

The flowers he holds in his hand is such meager recompense for what Billy did to him. He ruined two lives that day.

Billy draws a shuddered breath as he watches him. Heavy tears roll down his cheeks but he doesn't bother wiping them away. There's no one to see him cry.

"Goddamnit, Harrington," he gasps weakly. *"Fuck."*

He shoulders shake and he collapses into the chair next to the bed. Tears blur his vision and he squeezes his eyes shut, but nothing can drown out the pain of this moment.

His sobs sound like a dying animal over the pounding of his heart. In a moment of weakness, he takes the other man's hand. The flesh is cool to the touch, skin far too translucent to be healthy. But Billy grabs his hand and squeezes until his own choked breaths eventually steady.

"I'm so sorry," he whispers, broken. He takes a shaky breath as his fingers trace over Steve's knuckles.

Ten years. Ten years ago, he felt those knuckles on his face. They were both different people back then. He was filled with so much anger. And Steve… he was full of so much love.

Maybe if things had gone differently… maybe Steve could have even loved him.

But this was the path they were on. And that path led them here. Billy's never known anything but violence. His collision with Steve was no exception. At the time, the violence was easier to comprehend. It was easier to feel anger over any other emotion. He had wanted comfort that night, and this was how he dealt with it.

Forgiveness isn't in the cards for him, he knows this.

Their fates are sealed. And he can't take back the evils he's done.

The tears continue to fall as the ventilator beside him hisses rhythmically.

“I’m so sorry, Steve.”

Author's Note:

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